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- 1 Nadya Zimmerman. *Counterculture Kaleidoscope. Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008.

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- 3 As the book's title implies, Zimmerman's *Counterculture Kaleidoscope* seeks to provide an alternative perspective of the late Sixties San Francisco counterculture. In contradistinction to the canonical view of the period as oppositional in orientation, the author offers a new approach to understanding countercultural sensibility in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district as detached from rather than rebelling against the mainstream culture.
- 4 In Chapter One, the author presents the book's twofold aim: first, to reveal the pluralistic character of the San Francisco counterculture, its deliberate distance and disengagement from other social movements of the period, such as the civil rights movement and anti-Vietnam war demonstrations; second, to develop a detailed portrait of the sociopolitical complexities of late Sixties America that might prove useful to our own time. Having specialized in music, Zimmerman examines primary source-material including music, popular literature, personal narratives, and first-hand historical accounts in order to unravel the means with which counterculture crafted its own cultural image.
- 5 Thus, Chapter Two focuses on the outlaw-rebel persona which ignited the early development of counterculture. Though counterculturalists systematically avoided any direct engagement with racial issues, they nevertheless were drawn to outlaw philosophy as professed by the Black Panthers, as well as to the marginality and rebelliousness that the white culture typically associated with the black culture. Likewise, countercultural rock bands (ex. Janis Joplin and the Big Brothers) appropriated racially charged musical styles without addressing their sociopolitical implications.
- 6 Chapter Three discusses counterculturalists' embrace of Otherworldly, exotic signifiers (hallucinogenic drugs, non-western religions, free-floating spiritualities and natural origins) while avoiding any alignment with the neocolonial realities of Cold War politics and the Vietnam War. Moreover, by assuming an exoticist coherency, the counterculture

reinforced its unique self-image at the time without overtly challenging political reality but keeping it at arm's length. Zimmerman examines Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit" and Country Joe and the Fish's "Eastern Jam" as two case studies of the Haight-Ashbury sound incorporating exotic tropes in order "to appear to exist in an idealistic anti-Occidental frame."

- 7 But, if counterculture is above all associated with anti-commercialism, this it achieves by constructing an image of itself as "natural" even when its music is technologically mediated. The rock band that managed to trade on the ambiguous relationship between commercialism and technology while keeping up with its "natural" persona was the Grateful Dead, and they form the main subject of Chapter Four. A close examination of a couple of the band's songs, such as "Sugar Magnolia" and "Eleven," proves, according to Zimmerman, that the Dead appropriated "natural" signifiers that allowed them to interact with commercial culture and disguise their own consumerism. As the author characteristically puts it, the Dead in particular and counterculture in general twisted Huxley's suggestion from "do[ing] anything not to consume, go[ing] back to nature" (*Brave New World*) to "go back and consume nature."
- 8 However, without the integration of sexual, quasi-philosophical and spiritualist elements, the countercultural repertoire would be incomplete. Chapter Five discusses this "arrogant" mixture of eastern ideologies, beat zen, drugs, and sexual liberation which constitutes the New Age persona of the counterculture. Zimmerman's book, like the majority of Sixties criticism, underlines the counterculture's exploitation of the "free love" philosophy pointing out the movement's double standards that involved homophobia and the sexual abuse of women. For example, Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze" alludes to gratification of the moment through sexual and hallucinogenic experiences. However, even songs like "ReJoyce" by Jefferson Airplane, sang by Grace Slick, which seemingly empower female subjectivity, reinforce gender roles by emphasizing women's sexually derived power.
- 9 Zimmerman's conclusion is that the San Francisco counterculture never had a chance to succeed because it never had a specific goal and was always engaged in consumerism. As she puts it, "the spiritual-hallucinogenic-philosophical Otherworld of the counterculture was inevitably tied to the mainstream world, and those ties couldn't be broken. So, when in chapter Six, entitled "Helter Skelter," the author discusses the Altamont Festival and Manson's activities, these stories she does not treat as teleologically inevitable but as proof of how the counterculture sensibility in its pluralism and openness made itself vulnerable to racism, sexism, and violence. In this respect, Zimmerman's argument is similar to that of cultural historians like Thomas Frank, Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter who claim that the countercultural rebellion was never a "threat to society because it was never out to challenge society in the first place."
- 10 Although at times the argument becomes tautological and repetitious and despite the fact that the book does not fulfill its second goal of drawing affinities with our own era, this is a book well worth reading that offers insightful new perspectives on the sounds and lyrics of the San Francisco countercultural music scene.

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